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7-30-2014

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### Recommended Citation

University Relations, "Johnson Spends the Summer At Harvard Forest" (2014). *University Relations News Archive*. Paper 64.  
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## **Johnson Spends the Summer At Harvard Forest**

*Summary: Alayna is examining the relationship between climate and deforestation.*

(July 30, 2014)-Alayna Johnson '15, Poplar, Wisconsin, has spent her summer doing ecological research at Harvard Forest, a department of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences of Harvard University. A biology and environmental studies double-major, Johnson is working with Chris Williams, associate professor of geography at Clark University, [to examine the relationship between climate and deforestation](#).

The Harvard Forest Summer Research Program in Ecology is an opportunity for students to participate in 11 weeks of mentored, paid, independent research that focuses on the effects of natural and human disturbances on forest ecosystems. Each student in the program works with a faculty mentor to complete an independent research project. Students then present their work at the Forest's annual research symposium. They are encouraged to continue their work after the summer, and many publish their results in scientific papers, honors theses, conference abstracts, and other forums.

Johnson has had an interest in ecology for many years. That interest peaked in 2013 when she worked with Peter Wyckoff, associate professor of biology, on research regarding the effects of climate change, white-tailed deer, and invasive species on forests along west central Minnesota's prairie-forest border.

"I developed an interest in the role forests play within broader concerns of climate change and human-driven changes to the landscape, which is what most of my research this summer has focused on," she says.

Johnson has appreciated the opportunity to take part in additional hands-on research at the Forest. The experience, she says, has inspired her to think independently about science and to craft her own project within a broader research topic. Furthermore, the environment has exposed Johnson to a wide range of resources and contacts, which will prove beneficial as she clarifies her scientific interests and career goals.

"I am planning to partake in continuing ecological research and attend graduate school in the near future," she says. "I'd also like to unite my interest in ecology with my more personal interest in indigenous issues by working with tribal governments on the specific ecological, natural resource management, and environmental justice issues that affect many reservations."

The mission of the Harvard Forest is to develop and implement interdisciplinary research and education programs investigating the ways in which physical, biological, and human systems interact to change our earth. The central focus on research and education has been unchanged since the Forest's founding in 1907. Additional information is available at [harvardforest.fas.harvard.edu](http://harvardforest.fas.harvard.edu).

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